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Hill Astir Over Promises to Pakistan

In his eagerness to show a long-overdue toughness in dealing with the Soviet Union, President Carter sent his national security affairs adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to Pakistan for a highly publicized embrace of President Muhammad Zia's shaky military regime.

But congressional leaders—even some who are sympathetic to Carter's firm stance toward the Soviets—are not at all convinced that Brzezinski's negotiations with the wily Zia were the triumph the administration has tried to make them seem. Stung by Zia's gibe that the \$400 million U.S. aid offer was "peanuts," Carter and Brzezinski made concession after concession without extracting anything in return from the Pakistani dictator.

With the Russian bear huffing and puffing threateningly just across Pakistan's border in Afghanistan, Zia should have been desperate enough to make concessions for U.S. support. What has upset Capitol Hill leaders even more, sources say, is that the president's emissary seriously overstepped his authority, making commitments on behalf of the United States that he had no business making.

The most alarming of Brzezinski's promises to Zia was his assurance that the United States would come to his defense in the event of a Soviet attack. One angry congressional source pointed out that the existing treaties between the United States and Pakistan in no

way call for us to go to war for Zia's regime.

"Brzezinski had no authority to promise that," the source told my reporter Lucette Lagnado. "Nor, for that matter, does President Carter." He complained that the administration has returned to "unilateral decision-making"—the kind of secret actions that characterized so much of the Vietnam war.

In addition to this wholly improper guarantee of protection, Brzezinski assured the Pakistani dictator that U.S. aid would far exceed the reported \$400 million—again, a promise he had no right to give.

One top-secret cable reporting on the Zia-Brzezinski meetings states: "Brzezinski said that the \$400 million represents only the beginning. He tried to convince the Pakistanis that the value of the American contribution is much higher than he could presently publicize."

What Brzezinski explained to Zia was that the U.S. weapons would come from Pentagon inventories—where the prices are discounted by as much as 40 percent off the cost of armaments purchased from regular arms merchants. In other words, Zia would be getting a lot more weapons for the dollar than the publicly announced figures would indicate.

Aid to the Afghan rebels was also discussed by Zia and Brzezinski. In particular, according to one secret

cable, they weighed the possibility of "greater coordination of efforts between China, the U.S. and Pakistan to foment the rebellion from Pakistan." One method discussed for expediting aid to the rebels was the use of U.S. planes to fly weapons from China to Pakistan.

Brzezinski's decision to aid the Afghan rebels has caused resentment on Capitol Hill—and not just on grounds that he overstepped his authority. Critics feel that helping the rebels is not only futile, but is probably counterproductive, giving the Russians an excuse for staying in Afghanistan permanently.

Secret reports on the meeting between Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Indian President Indira Gandhi show how the Russians are using U.S. aid as a justification for their presence in Afghanistan.

"Gromyko said he would only consider withdrawal of troops when attempts to undermine Afghanistan from bases in Pakistan ceased," one cable states. Gromyko also expressed Soviet concern at "American efforts to turn Pakistan into a military base."

Footnote: A White House spokesman denied that Brzezinski "overstepped his role" in the consultations with Zia. Brzezinski's negotiations with the Pakistan leader, said the spokesman, were based on "written instructions from the president which were scrupulously followed."